

DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER

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Ministry of Information

SIR KENNETH CLARK, it is understood, has now submitted his plans to the Treasury. These are not yet public, but Sir Kenneth has already indicated that he is fully alive to the several contributions which can be made by features, by newsreels, and by documentaries. Propaganda by feature films is strictly limited by considerations of box-office, and it seems clear that the Ministry can do little more than assist producers in the choice of suitable story subjects. As for newsreels, their major need is for the fullest possible co-operation and the least amount of censorship. The documentary problem is not necessarily one of direct war-propaganda, but short films, whether cultural from the British Council or informational from the Ministry, can do an immense amount on world screens to show Britain at work. In some countries the emphasis must be laid on our energy and determination in the present conflict; in others what is needed is analysis and dramatisation of our social structure. Furthermore, it is vital that far more attention be given to seeing that overseas

distribution runs to maximum and significant audiences. We believe, however, that much of this distribution, especially in certain key-countries, is at its most valuable in the non-theatrical field; and that there is also a strong need for a re-development of non-theatrical technique at home, preferably with the goodwill of the Trade, who must by now be beginning to realise that genuine non-theatrical shows are no threat to the takings of local cinemas. (A wider analysis of non-theatrical needs will be found on another page.) Meantime, it is to be hoped that all sections of the Film Industry will back Sir Kenneth in his efforts to see that the fullest value is obtained from this important weapon.

Reels Without News

WITH GRACIE FIELDS leaving for Hollywood the newsreels will soon have more trouble than ever to find scenes of the war. It would be a pity if we had to fall back for our lighter news sequences upon such questionable humour as the much-publicised Unity Mitford item. If we are to laugh at the expense

of our pro-Nazis there is bigger game than Miss Mitford to be after. In general the newsreels tend to become cruder and heavier in editorial comment. The *Gaumont* reel is the worst offender and habitually whips up feeling either with a bludgeon or a sugar-boiler's ladle. *Paramount News* remains the most liberally-minded of the reels, and frequently shows courage and a welcome balance of judgment in its commentaries.

Newsreel up-to-the-minute coverage of the war is suffering from the scrappiness and padding which must almost inevitably result from the nature of the war and the tyranny of bi-weekly release dates. To satisfy public demand for fuller stories, there would seem to be a special opportunity for the *March of Time* style of treatment with its more leisured collection and shaping of sequences.

March of Time

MARCH OF TIME, unfortunately, since the outbreak of war seems scarcely to have been able to maintain the remarkable quality of its work as the screen's historian of European crises. *Battle Fleets of Britain*, the first war-time release, had to be based almost exclusively on peace-time shooting. Although unusually loosely constructed it added a characteristic *March of Time* element to other earlier screen accounts of the men and ships of the British Navy by including an analysis of the defensive strategy which determines the distribution of Allied sea-power in the world's oceans. The November issue—*Soldiers with Wings*—was a thematically unpretentious description of the U.S. Army Air Corps, depending for its effect less upon dramatic shape than upon outstandingly beautiful photography and upon the topical interest of all aspects of aerial warfare. In its December release, *Newsfronts of War—1940*, *March of Time* returned to a more highly dramatic style of treatment than it had lately employed. The item reviewed the outstanding world events of 1939 in terms of the news gathering and distributing services of the Associated Press and finished with an estimate of the importance and nature of Stalin's present and future policy. For January the reel comes right back to the top of its form with *Uncle Sam—Farmer*, a beautifully documented survey of one of the problems of the United States. It shows how U.S. agriculture brought its troubles upon itself by pursuing a blind short-term policy in the last war and points a moral now that the circumstances are likely to be repeated. Here is a first-class documentary on one of the long-term economic aspects of war which might well be imitated in this country.

Progress Marches On

LAST YEAR a feature film from the U.S.A., called *Boy's Town*, tugged at a million heart-strings. Its story was based on a real reform effort in the States by Father Flanagan. Now Assistant Prosecutor L. Bond, of the Adelaide Police Court, writes that the picture has impelled him to start a similar scheme. He hopes soon to see one in every large Australian town. All this is good ammunition for Trade people who don't like clerical onslaughts on the bad influence of the cinema. If feature films can pull off these exciting and sentimental efforts, we commend the idea to

any British producers who are not fully committed to spies, comic Tommies, murder dramas, and mademoiselles.

Broadcasting

IT IS NOT EASY to tell whether the constant protests against the alleged dilapidation of the B.B.C. Home Service really represent popular opinion. Some say that the average licence-holder is (and always was) content with light music, variety, and lashings of cinema organ, and that, therefore, the B.B.C. must cater mostly for the majority. Others retort that it is the B.B.C.'s job to raise the public's taste, not pander to it. But, in point of fact, programmes in recent weeks have improved, and oppressed minorities have less to complain of—provided they can adjust their hours of listening to times other than the evening. Complaints, indeed, are often really about times of broadcasts; and here certain classes, such as classical music lovers, may have legitimate grievances. In general it seems that the B.B.C. is still rather too complacent about the fare it offers; and heaven knows why we still have no alternative programme. The B.E.F. programmes radiated on the London Regional wave-length seem—apart from an occasional Gracie—to be either dull or unsuitable. Rude remarks about the News Bulletin have been answered in part by Edward Ward's superb relays from Finland; these challenge the best of the U.S.A. link-ups, and both in style and matter they should quickly cancel the dreary recitations by other so-called observers. In regard to the question of the times of those broadcast items which appeal to smallish numbers of listeners, we hope shortly to publish some suggestions as to how the problem could be met.

Documentary News Letter

THE FIRST ISSUE of *Documentary News Letter* was a success. This is not an editorial judgment, nor a literary one. It is strangely enough a "box-office" one. We are not accustomed to box-office acclaim; nor do we entirely trust it. But the fact remains that many wrote to tell us how glad they were to see our first number and, more important, many filled up the little blue form. The response has been so unquestionable that we have had no hesitation in going into print immediately, instead of waiting for six months, as we had intended.

Our audience is a varied one. There are teachers craving any scraps of news about educational films; there are the film societies, who, carrying on in spite of difficulties, are anxious to hear of their fellow-adventurers and of the latest worth-while films, and there are the newsreel and specialised audiences who like to know something of the why and wherefore of the cinema. There are also the journalists and the odd man in Wardour Street with a thought above the ballyhoo. Lastly, there is the biggest group of all, those who are using documentary films non-theatrically to try and see the life of this country and its people in a richer and more real context than the theatrical cinema usually offers.

We believed that, in these days when many periodicals are ceasing publication, a news letter, however humble, would be welcome. The response to the first issue proves that we were right. But we need many more subscriptions if we are to enlarge the scope of the news letter and to improve our sources of information and discussion.

FILMS AT THE NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR

BY RICHARD GRIFFITH

This article is an extract from Richard Griffith's survey of the films at the New York World's Fair. It is based on an exhaustive study which he has prepared for American Film Center and is reproduced now with the permission of "Films," a new American quarterly. Griffith is an American.

THE ONLY FOCAL exhibit of films in operation throughout the Fair was that contained in the Little Theatre of the Science and Education Building. This programme, supervised by Philip McConnell, is worth extended analysis. It made a valiant effort to gather and show all the most important films on its thematic subjects, science, education, medicine, and social problems, and therefore provides a key to the extent to which the motion picture is serving these activities today. Pare Lorentz's famous and popular government films, *The Plow that Broke the Plains* and *The River*, represent well what documentary has done to dramatise the conservation of national resources. Though they are romantic rather than scientific in approach, though the solutions they offer are not adequate, they do give full statement to their problems—a statement expressed, moreover, in terms of urgent need.

The British documentary movement has sent a selection of films representing its approach to social problems as expressed in such subjects as nutrition (*Enough to Eat?*), housing (*Housing Problems*, *Kensal House*), local government (*The Londoners*), and education (*Children at School*). Of unequal merit technically, these films indicate the magnitude of the task the British movement has tackled. The wide range of subjects reveals a disposition to present a complete picture of the modern effort to reorganise society on a scientific basis. Some of them, like *Housing Problems* and *Enough to Eat?*, have already influenced national policy, and all of them have contributed to the reputation of the documentary film as an agency for bringing the ordinary citizen in touch with the forces which govern his life.

The Little Theatre's programme on social problems might well pretend to represent the best achievement of the documentary film. The high standard here may be attributed largely to the fact that documentary technicians themselves are deeply interested in such subjects.

Of all the government exhibits at the Fair, the British Pavilion probably had the best opportunity to gain prestige by appealing to special groups of the film public. The British documentary film is world famous, and educators, publicists, and technicians have long been curious to see examples of its work. Instead, only a small group of documentaries is to be seen, and the selection is random. *Song of Ceylon* is there, and *Shipyard* and *The Londoners* are occasionally shown, but such historically important pictures as *Industrial Britain*, *Coal Face* and *The Saving of Bill Blewitt* are absent. *Housing Problems* and *Enough to Eat?*, which are the most socially important, the most influential, and the most British of these films, are shown at the Science and Education Building but not at the national exhibit. In place of these, the Pavilion offers a heterogeneous collection of travelogues and "interest" films, incompetent enough and dull enough to alienate the most passionately Anglophile group, much more a lay audience accustomed to the tempo of American films.

So many of these pictures are below the lowest possible level of audience acceptance that one at first imagines them to have been selected at random by men who had never seen any of them. But repeated visits to the exhibit gradually reveal a motive for the choice, focussed in the British Newsreel which opens each programme. Before the outbreak of the war, the items in this reel were devoted almost wholly to such "events" as the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace, the visit of Their Majesties to a children's camp, the opening of a garden party by the Duchess of Kent. Since the war was declared, the reel has displayed the might of the military. As with the newsreel, so with the rest of the programme: these unimaginative and rather pompous films on British landscapes, monuments and sports, project the England of tradition and stability. They summon the past to reinforce the present, saying with J. B. Priestley in "English Journey", "Damn you; I'm all right."

The documentary movement in England has devoted itself over a period of ten years to dramatising the Britain of today. Whatever the success or failure of its more ambitious aims, it has never failed to do the primary job of urging the citizen to accept social responsibility. An excellent example of the way this job has been done under present conditions of sponsorship is contained in the new film, *Men of Africa*. Presented by the Colonial Empire Marketing Board, the film is intended by its sponsors as a defence of British colonial government. Using the same propagandist methods as those employed in the Hall of Colonial Administration at the British Pavilion, it tells how England is trying to raise the living standard of her primitive subjects. By medical care, by education, by scientific agriculture, tropical colonies and their inhabitants are put on an equal footing with the rest of the Empire. The film thus states that Britain's right to govern colonies is determined by the extent to which she fits them to govern themselves. In articulating this idea Alexander Shaw's direction has transformed the film from an apology for the British Empire into an inculcation of England's responsibility toward subject populations.

Few of the important documentaries embodying this approach are at the British Pavilion, and the films actually shown there have little relation to England today. They are, in fact, wholly opposed to the function for which the documentary film has become famous. Nevertheless, the British Cinema is one of the best-attended theatres at the Fair. This may be partly accounted for by the fact that, even at its worst, the technical ingenuity of the British fact film is higher than the average of the Fair. Most popular of all films at the British Theatre are the instructionals—Mary Field's and Percy Smith's *Secrets of Life* series, the Strand films of the London Zoo, and two remarkable engineering pictures by Arthur Elton, *The Transfer of Power* and *Springs*. Only in this category is the best of Britain's film work to be seen at its national exhibit.

STORY FILM OF THE MONTH

MR SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON

IF THE ANGELS were tempted again to take sides in a world war, and decided to come to the aid of our Minister of Information, their first instructions would send our official propagandists scurrying off to substitute the remaining bookings of *The Lion Has Wings* with immediate showings of *Mr Smith Goes to Washington*.

Not because *The Lion Has Wings* is a particularly bad film, and not because Columbia Pictures sent Mr Smith to Washington to say anything whatsoever about our immediate national troubles. Not even because Mr Smith is concerned to flatter the existing phase of the democratic method of government for which we are fighting. But director Frank Capra has made the screen's best piece of pro-democratic propaganda by revealing democracy as open to more exploitation and abuse than Dr Goebbels could readily invent in ninety minutes, and yet as being inherently susceptible of transformation into something to make you cheer your head off when it is seen with the vision, and quickened with the vitality, of any man "who has learned to tell human rights from a punch in the nose".

The phrase is Mr Smith's. In the person of James Stewart he goes as a profoundly unsophisticated Senator to Washington and is

criminally exploited by his State's political racketeers. He uncovers their hypocrisies and is faced with a choice between serving the political machine or being destroyed by it. Mr Smith will not submit, is framed on a false charge, broken and disgraced. And all the other Mr Smiths who stayed at home are likely to go on being exploited and abused; their public funds filched and wasted; their press controlled by corrupt politicians; their police employed as a racketeers' private army. The film shirks none of these growing pains of democracy in evolution, and the agony of them is sufficient to drive Mr Smith beyond the acquiescent cynicism of his friends into a black despairing hatred of the system of government he has idealised.

And then the brooding interrogation of Mr Abraham Lincoln in stone (assisted by Jean Arthur, since Mr Smith and all of us need also the warmer stimulation of flesh and blood) works the democratic miracle upon Mr Smith. He is reminded that Abe also had his racketeers, that such parasites on the body democratic are not big men but "just throw big shadows", that laws and constitutions are made in the long democratic run by the Mr Lincolns and preserved by the Mr Smiths; and it is up to men of their kidney

to use those laws and constitutions, not as phrases to be reverently recited, mere words memorable and dead, but as weapons to fight with and tools to build with.

So Mr Smith goes back to the Senate and, using his democratic weapons, fights and breaks the corrupt political machine.

Mr Smith Goes to Washington is a remarkable compound of qualities. In theme reminiscent of *Mr Deeds Goes to Town*, it is in every way an advance on the earlier film. Brilliantly cast and with magnificent dialogue, it is almost completely free of Capra's former weakness for smart-aleck sentimentalities. No film has established its background with greater authenticity and no film has built to a more powerful climax. Yet amidst all its excitements it contrives quite naturally and palatably to explain essential details of the American system of government which even an instructional film for jurists would have found none too easy to handle.

But these are details. Here is a film that opens a window on to something worth fighting for. Here is a film which reveals an opportunity which dictatorship, whether from the right or left, whether home or foreign-made, would take away from us—the future opportunity to send, not only our Mr Smiths to Washington, but our Mr Browns to Westminster, to build our system of government the way we want it built. Thank you, Mr Smith.

FILM OF THE MONTH FOR CHILDREN

Gulliver's Travels. A Paramount picture. Production: Max Fleischer. Direction: Dave Fleischer. Cert. U.

Reviewed by an educationist

GULLIVER'S TRAVELS may have been satire a few hundred years ago, but today it takes a lot of work to find it anything but one of the world's best stories. Children love it: at least they love to have it told to them. Which is to say that the essential story is the first thing and the fantastic detail the next. Let's not worry about satire; the thing's a fairy tale. Max Fleischer got that bit right anyway, but in order to make his fairy tale palatable to grown-ups he had to introduce boy and girl as Prince and Princess. This childish intrusion is going to bore the children but considerably less than most films do, so let it pass. Nobody except the Film Society is going to compare it with *Snow White*, so let that pass too.

I prophesy that the children are going to like the colour, shout with glee at Gabby, the bizarre little town crier of Lilliput, and quake with him when he discovers Gulliver on the beach. They will shriek with delight at the Heath Robinsonish engineering feat of trussing up Gulliver and pulling him through the streets. The film is full of the kind of incident which children like; the discovery of Gulliver's watch, the firing of the pistol, the table-top cabaret and the conquest of the Blefescu fleet. They won't have time to mind the music or the love story.

On the whole *Gulliver* is almost as good as you would wish it for a Saturday morning. That is my guess. What two children did think of it comes next.

Reviewed by a schoolboy

GULLIVER'S TRAVELS deserves the very highest of praise; it completely fulfilled my expectations. It is as prolific in songs and laughter as was *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

To single out any figure for individual praise is not an easy task, but of some, however, mention must be made. Gabby, the town crier of Lilliput, though of secondary importance to the plot, is by far the most comic person in a land of comic people. The two kings, Bombo and Little, have all the characteristics of stage clowns, but their lack of regal dignity only adds to the wealth of humour. Gulliver does not really justify his position as the central figure until the end of the film. Then, however, he atones for this by uniting the warring countries of Lilliput and Blefescu for ever.

It was not only the Lilliputians who were sorry when Gulliver sailed his boat away into the blue.

Reviewed by another schoolboy

ON THE WHOLE I liked *Gulliver's Travels*, most of it making me roar with laughter.

I thought the storm scene very good, the lighting effects beautiful, and the scene where the Lilliputians looked for Gulliver while actually standing on his chest the funniest. The two kings taking fingerfuls of icing off the wedding cake, and the binding of Gulliver amused me very much too.

I liked Gabby, the town crier, and the little Blefescu spy most, while the great wealth of detail on every object impressed me tremendously. I did not like the Prince and Princess at all, as they seemed unnatural and obviously drawings, whereas Kings Little and Bombo appeared very human, and I would have been quite as happy with a less fortunate end for the pair!

Altogether I think Max Fleischer, the producer, did well, but that Disney could have done better!

on this page next month

**THE STARS LOOK DOWN
THE WIZARD OF OZ**

PUBLIC REACTION

THE LION HAS WINGS

[*Précis of a survey made by Mass-Observation, an organisation attempting to analyse British public opinion, run by Tom Harrison and Charles Madge.*]

OF TWO HUNDRED people interviewed the week before Christmas, 55 per cent had seen the film, an exceptionally high figure, partly because the film was released without bars and partly because so many went from a "sense of duty", a quality accentuated in war-time. For example:—

"My father says 'Oh, it's magnificent, you must go and see it'. He hasn't seen it himself, but he thinks it right to talk like that." (Man, 20, middle class.)

"I didn't go as it was a war picture. I know it was propaganda but I didn't go." (Woman, 60, working class.)

"I must see that picture. I don't like aeroplane pictures, but I feel it's my duty." (Woman, 50, middle class.)

Fostering this tendency was the method of advertising the film, which sometimes took the form of aeroplane displays, but more often of civic receptions or formal parades of soldiers or air force men at the opening. At Southampton, for example, the Mayor gave the film a send-off at two cinemas, while at Croydon fifty air force men marched through the streets to the Odeon. At High Wycombe, the Air Ministry organised a display.

71% of those who had seen the film said that they had liked it, 38% of them liking it very much, these being mainly women, and, to a lesser extent, older men. But a qualitative analysis of the reasons given for the like or dislike of the film reveals that, of all who had seen it, 44% found something positive to praise, while 43% criticised the lack of story and 27% criticised the propaganda element. A very large proportion of those who liked the film contented themselves with a few words, "very nice", "I enjoyed it", "it was very good", while very few of those who disliked the film failed to give reasons in detail. Most criticise the story:—

"There was no continuation, it was just a collection of snapshots. It could have been good with a story." (Man, 30, worker.)

"Topping, but the love element might have been cut out; that was silly." (Woman, 50, middle class.)

People, especially the working classes, conservatively resented the "lack of story", felt more strongly it was propaganda. Some were content to dismiss the film with the one word "propaganda"; others were more explicit:—

"I think it un-British to shove propaganda down your throat like that; they should regard us as more intelligent than that." (Man, 20, worker.)

"I didn't like it at all, it was propaganda. Nobody wants to see that sort of thing, it's not entertainment." (Woman, 25, working class.)

17% of the survey said that they could not believe the film:—

"I was thinking that it looked very beautiful, but with my experience of Government departments I didn't believe it. But it emphasises the bravery of the R.A.F." (Woman, 40, middle class.)

Some, however, were impressed by the revelation of our air defences.

"It was fine to see how it all works. So many don't know." (Man, 45, middle class.)

"I think all people who are nervous should go and see it." (Woman, 25, working class.)

"We feel quite safe now because we know all that Hitler does and as soon as his planes leave the ground we know all about it." (Woman, 40, middle class.)

The Press, on the other hand, was almost unanimous in praising the film. 83% of Press criticism was favourable to *The Lion Has Wings*, and 58% praised the film greatly. Of all the critics only Graham Greene mentioned what one in every twenty men-in-the-street interviewed spontaneously complained of, namely, that some sequences were from *The Gap*, a film made some years ago to prove how weak our defences were. *The Aeroplane*, in an article entitled "The Unicorn Has Tailplanes", was highly sarcastic especially at the technical details:—

"It is one of the most essential features of any air picture that the characters should take off in one sort of aeroplane, fly in another sort, and alight in a third entirely different sort. . . .

"One moment the Germans are a formation of Tiger Moths, the next they are an Empire flying boat or a B.A.C. Drone. Only the pilots remain the same, which seems a pity, they are such an evil looking lot."

Observer reports of audience response to *The Lion Has Wings* were made at the Leicester Square Theatre, London, at Cricklewood, at Tottenham Court Road, at Streatham, and in "Worktown". Altogether 143 response points were noted in the film, but only eight sequences got a response at every show:—

- (1) First sight of the King at his Scottish camp. *Loud claps.*
- (2) First sight of Hitler. *Boos or hisses.*
- (3) Second sight of Hitler. *Boos or hisses.*
- (4) Sight of children being looked after in opening sequence. *Murmurs of sympathy.*

(5) Emmett's remark about "Scotsmen throwing heavy things about". *Laughs.*

(6) The Royal Family doing the "Chestnut Tree". *Loud laughs.*

(7) One of the airmen on the Kiel raid deciding that his party will have to be put off until the next night. *Laughs.*

(8) The pilot asking his operator to get Mr Middleton on the wireless. *Laughs.*

Bewildered comment was caused by the sudden flash-back to Queen Elizabeth; the scene at the end which the *New Statesman* described as "Miss Oberon stating her war aims", caused a great deal of adverse comment, as did the end of the armament-making scene. The end of the film was generally clapped very half-heartedly and not at all at "Worktown".

In brief, the film was widely seen; in at least two cinemas it broke all existing records despite concurrent showings. Yet while a large percentage of those who saw it and an overwhelming majority of the Press praised it, the film may not have had such an encouraging effect as was hoped. Many of those who said they liked the film apparently only did so because they thought it the right thing to say, and those who did not like it time and time again objected to both propaganda and story. It seems likely that famous actors confuse matters if they are dragged into a picture only because of the box-office value of their names, and that the propaganda of the film needs to be much more subtle. What most won public confidence in this picture was the humour of everyday life.

EDITORIAL NOTE. These, and many other conclusions reached by Mass-Observation studies, make it clear that a fully-organised study of audience reactions, if sufficiently well-financed, would be immensely valuable to the Film Trade, to documentary film-makers, and quite possibly to the Ministry of Information. Mass-Observation is planning schemes for this on a nation-wide coverage, and any readers of DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER who would like to help should write to Mr Tom Harrison, Mass-Observation, 82 Ladbroke Road, London, W.1.

LONDON SCIENTIFIC FILM SOCIETY

The L.S.F.S. was the first London Film Society to open after the outbreak of war. Its programmes are balanced between films for the layman and films for the scientist.

Join the London Scientific Film Society, 30 Bedford Row, W.C.1. CHANCERY 5201.

Subscription 15/- or 10/- for a season of four shows. Guest tickets, 3/9 and 2/6.

REALIST FILM UNIT

SPRING 1940 FILMS

A FILM OF A NATIONAL NEWSPAPER
FOR "THE TIMES"

DIRECTED BY PAUL ROTH

A FILM OF NATIONAL RESOURCES
FOR THE GAS INDUSTRY

DIRECTED BY EDGAR ANSTEY

A FILM OF LIFE IN GREAT BRITAIN
FOR THE BRITISH COUNCIL

DIRECTED BY JOHN TAYLOR & PHILIP LEACOCK

111 CHARING CROSS ROAD LONDON WC2

BRITISH DOCUMENTARY ACTIVITY

THE NEW YEAR sees the British documentary people busier than they have been for the past six months. Film Centre is drawing up a general report—from a film point of view—on the changes brought about in social living in Great Britain by the war—and, as part of the report, is preparing detailed scenarios, with research memoranda, on four social subjects. Three of these, and the personnel now working on each, are: *Evacuation* (Basil Wright and Paul Fletcher), *The Preservation of Cultural Life* (Arthur Elton and Stanley Hawes), and *Food Problems: Rationing and Nutrition* (Edgar Anstey, R. I. Grierson and Ralph Bond). The fourth subject is not yet fixed but consideration is being given to *Public Opinion* (Paul Rotha and Donald Alexander). This project is being carried out in co-operation with P.E.P. This is one of the most comprehensive and carefully planned projects for documenting life in film terms yet undertaken.

Most of the films commissioned last October by the British Council are either finished or are nearing show-copies. They are the G.P.O. Film Unit's *S.S. Ionian* by Humphrey Jennings; Realist Film Unit's film of British life by John

Taylor and Philip Leacock; British Films' *London River*; a Len Lye colour abstract; G.B. Instructional's *British Empire Round Atlantic*, by Mary Field, and *On Guard in the Air* by Bruce Woolfe; Strand Films' *These Children Are Safe* by Alex Shaw; two from Paramount, *Britain Shoulders Arms* and *Royal Review*; two from British Movietone, *Women in Wartime* and *War Comes to London*; and *Thoroughbred*, a film about horses, by Pathé. Each film has been designed primarily for overseas distribution.

Publicity Films report that Montgomery Tully has just finished *Circus*, a film for the National Savings Committee, and a film for the Ford Motor Company about Dagenham. Also in hand at Merton Park Studios is a film dealing with the National Register. John Lewis is doing a film for Cadbury on food rationing and Tully has started out on a film dealing with industrial machinery behind the war. British Colloids have commissioned a technical film from Publicity Films. Another item in the Merton Park schedule is a film on the manufacture of liquid oxygen. Cecil Musk continues in charge of all production.

The G.P.O. Film Unit reports that Harry Watt's *Balloon Barrage* is finished and that the whole Unit is working on a munitions subject. Realist Film Unit hopes to have Rotha's "The Times" film, *The Thunderer*, ready by the middle of February; Walter Leigh is writing the music with Constant Lambert conducting the Sadlers Wells Theatre Orchestra. At G.B. Instructional, Mary Field is now engaged on a series of four films for the National Federation of Women's Institutes. She has also completed, for theatrical release, *Babes in the Wood*, a film about young animals; *Valley of the Sun*, a film of the River Douro; and *Men Against Mountains*, which deals with afforestation. Science Films have in hand Government work of a confidential kind. From Spectator Films will come at least two new *Points of View*, "Is Efficiency a Vice?" and "Is Craftsmanship Better than Mass-Production?" The Shell Film Unit has Cinemagazine No. 4 ready, is working on a film about Fuel Oil and is making versions of eleven films in Dutch, French, Portuguese and Spanish. *March of Time* states that one of its units is joining the B.E.F. in France. During the month two films, *The Gift of Health* and *Sport at the Local*, have been made by a new unit, Cameo Films, directed by James Carr and photographed by Robert Gee. A. P. Herbert comments the pub one.

DOCUMENTARY IN THE UNITED STATES

Pare Lorentz' success with *The Plow* and *The River* well earned the promotion of his outfit. It is now the U.S. Film Service with a governmental production programme line-up. Congress has not yet made an appropriation to cover the distribution activities of the Service but meanwhile the cameras are turning. Lorentz himself has two films in production. *Behold the Man* is about unemployment in America. It has already had a radio production by the Columbia Workshop in America and by the B.B.C. in England. From the radio versions we judge that it marks yet another step forward for Lorentz, with dialogue and characterisation more intimate than anything in *The Plow* or *The River*. His other film is based on Paul de Kruif's *Fight for Life*, and deals with the Chicago Maternity Center. Joris Ivens is back from Ohio with most of the footage for his rural electrification film, to be called *Power in the Land*. The fourth film in the U.S. Film Service list is one for the AAA and is being directed by Robert Flaherty. Flaherty is in the Middle West and if we know anything his cameras will be grinding to some purpose.

Design for Living sounds like Noel Coward but this time it is another design and another way of life: it is the title of Willard van Dyke's 16 mm. two-reeler on one of New York's progressive girls' colleges. The film has been sponsored by the Alumnae Association of the Sarah Lawrence College to show the advantages of the progressive education which the school provides.

Films is a new quarterly devoted to the discussion and analysis of the cinema. It deals mainly with the aesthetics of films and most of the

contributors to the first issue are technicians. Mainly they talk of practice but there is also theoretical discussion and two scenarios are reprinted. Leading articles are *The Cinematized Child* by Edgar Dale, and *Sound in Films* by Alberto Cavalcanti. Kurt London writes on *Film Music of the Quarter* and Richard Griffith on *Films at the World's Fair*. The editorial board is headed by Jay Leyda, whose articles in *Cinema Quarterly* and *World Film News* will be remembered. *Films* is issued by Kamin Publishers, 15 West 56th Street, New York City, and costs two dollars per annum.

The Association of School Film Libraries acts as agent and headquarters for the hundreds of regional, state, university and school film libraries throughout the U.S. and the first volume of its revised catalogue represents a fair offering at the end of one year's working. One item catches our eye. Listed for the first time and not available elsewhere to educational organisations are ten *March of Time* subjects, including *Maginot Line* and *Nazi Germany*, some on U.S. services such as coastguards and one or two on social problems like *Prison Reform* and *Refugees*. These are a notable addition to the non-theatrical films of America and their use in schools and colleges is already providing the basis of thoughtful discussion.

American Film Center has just issued a circular recommending and describing thirty selected 16 mm. films available for special non-theatrical uses. Designed to articulate the demand for non-theatrical films, the subjects are grouped as follows: *Public Administration*, *Community Life*,

Education, *Ethnology*, *Animals*, *Workers and Jobs*, and *Health*. This pamphlet will help discussion groups throughout the country to choose wisely the material for their meetings.

Human Relations. Another group of films now providing fruitful discussion in United States educational circles is the series of shorts produced by the PEA's Commission on Human Relations. These shorts are re-edited Hollywood features. Shorn of subsidiary plots and cut down to two reels, the essential problems of the films are presented as case studies of social, racial and personality problems. There is ample evidence that the films are promoting lively discussion and the diehards who still denounce the movies for trespassing on the school are shouted down loudest of all by the children themselves. A new catalogue (just issued to replace an earlier edition which sold at the rate of five hundred a month) gives outlines of the films and teacher's notes, along with a provocative account of the project's means and ends by Alice V. Keliher.

The Museum of Modern Art Film Library announces that a new series of ten programmes of French, German and Russian films will be shown in its auditorium daily for an indefinite period. The films include *The Italian Straw Hat*, *Maedchen in Uniform*, *Kino-Pravda*, *Potemkin*, and *Arsenal*. The programmes will be shown in rotation so that by attending on ten consecutive days, or by attending on a set day for ten weeks, the complete cycle can be seen. This rotation technique has been tried out already with great success.

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NON-THEATRICAL DISTRIBUTION IN GREAT BRITAIN

This article is a digest of a much longer statement of the war-time situation in the field of non-theatrical film distribution. Copies of the fuller text can be obtained on application to Film Centre Ltd., 34 Soho Square, London, W.1. Please enclose threepence with your request to cover postage and dispatch.

WHEN WAR broke out much of the non-theatrical work of films vanished overnight. Audiences were disbanded in schools, in workers' institutes, in Adult Education bodies, and in film societies and study groups. It looked as though a period of stagnation was going to undo the value of the significant and rapidly growing distribution of educational and documentary films. But the enquiring cultural life of a nation cannot be put on a shelf, and before long evacuated teachers were organising shows both instructional and entertaining for their evacuated pupils. The projectors used were soon pressed into the service of local schools, and in the evenings the villages and evacuated adults gathered round for a third session. Hundreds of adult groups and societies have been formed.

Soon, the adult groups and societies revived and their postponed programmes were once more put into effect. The demand for 16mm. films greatly increased. All the national film libraries report an increase in traffic and the 1938 figure of 29,000 dispatches from the Empire Film Library went up to 37,000 in 1939, and that period includes the one dead month of September.

Reports from the Provinces

A teacher from the North of England writes:

"The film has been a boon in our school since evacuation has meant the shift system. Here, in ———, half the day we are obliged to use a building with four rooms suitable as classrooms, but we have a good sized hall. Weekly film programmes have enabled us to instruct and amuse a big crowd of youngsters at the same time. We have therefore organised background shows independent of the ordinary curricular limits. This successful venture has proved that regular background shows are worthwhile and valuable as a humanising influence. We should like to continue them in peace-time, and in school hours. A good war-time slogan would be 'A sound projector for every village hall, community centre and co-operative hall'."

An observer in Manchester says:

"The sound projector owned by the city education authority has been taken round to various reception areas and used for school and evening shows, and lent to certain areas for use in the schools. Silent projectors have been distributed to various evacuated Manchester schools, and have also been made available to all the schools in these reception areas. These projectors have been particularly useful where there have been double shifts. Some projectors have been used to a limited extent

for small groups of non-evacuated children in Manchester. All films for this purpose have been supplied from the Manchester Education Committee's library, through the same organisation, and in the same way, as books."

In Scotland, the teachers organised, on their own initiative, a non-theatrical scheme operating on twenty travelling projectors in twenty areas—(a report of this appeared in our last issue). This voluntary scheme was supported for two months by the Scottish Ministry of Information. Now future plans depend largely on what attitude is taken by the Scottish Office.

An interesting development has also been seen in districts where teachers organised themselves into committees and approached the local cinema managers for the use of their theatres. The Odeon circuit reports that it has organised about forty shows of this kind. Their local managers co-operated with local reception or teachers committees. Sometimes these committees were ready to hand, in such cases as the Bath Children's Cinema Council. At other times, the education authority took the initiative and organised the shows with the assistance of the local managers.

A Glorious Makeshift

The whole situation reflects the continuing bravery of the teachers and the informal educators. Their effort is magnificent. It is a glorious makeshift. Sometimes makeshifts get by in peace-time, but in war-time we are apt to see them for what they are. Today a national non-theatrical plan is necessary, and this plan must be based on the needs of the war-time community.

A prominent educationist said: "Two things are specially needed. The first is the provision of more sound projectors obtainable on loan or hire at reasonably low rates. The other is, simply, more films. As to projectors, I hope that Local Education Authorities in particular, will not consider that the provision of this necessary piece of equipment for their Senior Schools is a luxury in war-time. An educational projector should be a valuable aid to teachers in reception areas and the fact that it could also be used to provide social and educational amenities for the older population is an additional merit. The Board of Education is encouraging Education Authorities to help voluntary services concerned with youth; and this is one of the services they can render. In the matter of films, the question of supply is equally urgent. A new standard was set when the Post Office Film Unit began its work; and the films which have since been sponsored by other organisations show further possi-

bilities. They have aroused an interest which cannot at present be adequately met."

We shall probably see in time that these needs hardly differ from the long term needs of the democratic community in peace. It is on these needs that the plan must be prepared.

The Fundamental Needs

There is first of all the need of the schools. With improvised educational facilities in many cases the lack of proper educational equipment is already being seriously felt. Film lessons can compensate, and when the new curriculum, which must replace the old, is being formulated, film must bulk large in the scheme.

A school inspector says:

"With money and transport taken for granted, the following film activities should be arranged for the Schools Films for curricular use, for background teaching and for amusement must be provided to the schools in the reception areas through regional libraries. There should be a sound projector in each school in the rural areas, and this should serve the needs of the whole village as well as the school. In towns a projector is necessary in each neighbourhood for the use of groups of schools and local organisations. A scheme similar to the Scottish scheme must be operated in England, with regular tours of 16 mm. projectors to those areas which do not come into the category of having a projector for the exclusive use of the village or neighbourhood.

The use of films for general educational purposes should be extended to all places where people can get together. Institutes, clubs, associations, would serve as foci for the cultural life of the district or the village."

Secondly, the Adult Education field, which includes the Workers' Educational Association, the University Extension, the literary and debating societies, the village institutes, calls for special treatment. These are going to be the discussion groups of the war. In many of them local problems and difficulties will find a nightly airing. Authoritative films would help to guide the discussions and civic co-operation would thereby be facilitated.

The third great group in the community to whom film can offer a valuable service is the women's audience. This will be one of the important information areas during the war.

Food and economy are largely women's problems. They will require information, help and guidance. Films directed to the existing large audiences of women in the country are today a fundamental need.

Next comes the Army, Navy and the civilian service groups. Here the demand is mainly for entertainment, but many of the recruits to all the services—active and civilian—have much to learn about the techniques and instruments of their job. Astonishingly enough, the Army Educational Committee was dissolved immediately war was declared. Technical films in peace-time have proved serviceable to industries, and might again

provide the basis of a quick and effective technical education for the services.

There are also special needs of limited sections of the community in war-time. Farmers for instance might welcome the latest agricultural knowledge if it were attractively portrayed in films.

Money

All this involves capital expenditure in terms of projectors and auxiliary apparatus; alterations in local budgets as well as direct appropriations from the Treasury; centralised and regional planning, firstly of production and secondly of distribution; and the regional operation of distribution. There is in existence a supply of film which in peace-time did something of a job. Today the first needs of production are bound to be war needs, and related to war, and much new production will have to be initiated from official departments. But if a wide non-theatrical distribution scheme were to be started many sources of production, momentarily dried up, would flow again.

While wide and directive non-theatrical distribution is absolutely vital during the war, its value will continue and increase when the war is over. The acquiring of a wide non-theatrical scheme by Great Britain would be of permanent value, and of the greatest use in the post-war period, when education of this nature will be vital to the reconstruction and betterment of our social and civic communities.

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FILM CATALOGUE OF THE MONTH

NON-THEATRICAL FILM LIBRARIES

The Empire Film Library. (New Edition September, 1939.) Price 7d. post free, from the Imperial Institute, South Kensington, S.W.7.

THIS CATALOGUE is an indispensable seven-pennyworth for every teacher or social worker who uses films. Since the 1937 edition was published, borrowers have had to manage with supplementary lists printed on cumbersome galley-proof sheets; this new and complete list with its well-arranged subject index is, therefore, opportune. An improvement in future editions would be some sort of loose-leaf binding to allow for the insertion of additional lists.

In a short preface, the Director of the Imperial Institute contributes a note on the work of the Library and on its remarkable growth. During the last four years, the number of registered borrowers has increased from under two thousand to three thousand five hundred; on this basis, some hundreds of thousands of children and adults must see the Empire Library films each year.

It is encouraging to find that considerable additions have been made to the number of copies of those films most in demand. Nothing is said, however, about the standards which govern the acceptance of films for inclusion in the Library. Although, in general, experience shows

that the level of films issued by the Library is extremely high, occasionally a film on an overseas topic is so completely lacking in film craftsmanship as to be valueless; such a film as *The Gate of China* is, in the reviewer's opinion, a case in point. An examination of the catalogue reveals, too, the presence in the Library of one or two films which will offend the educationalist through overstressed publicity. (It is a minor defect of the catalogue that the origin of many films is not specified.) Commercially sponsored films are permissible in the school cinema if the element of publicity in them is slight, and their positive educational value is great. The films issued by the Petroleum Films Bureau are one indication that some industries at least recognise the wisdom of creating instructional films free from a narrowly competitive spirit. But it must be admitted that a certain amount of undesirable advertising has, in the past, found its way into the schoolroom through the film. On these grounds, certain films offered by industry might have been gently but firmly refused.

The Empire Film Library is a unique institution, and its new catalogue is a reminder of the debt of gratitude due to the Director from all those who seek to broaden the horizons of their pupils through films, slides and other visual aids.

Note: Borrowers of films are asked to apply as much in advance as possible, to give alternative dates for bookings, and to return the films immediately after they have been shown so that others may make use of them. The terms of hire are liable to alteration with short notice.

Educational & General Services, Little Holt, Merton Lane, Highgate, London, N.6. A very wide selection of silent films of all kinds, particularly of overseas interest, and a few sound films. A hire charge is made and prints may be purchased outright. 16 mm.

Ensign Film Library, 88-89 High Holborn, London, W.C.1. Wide selection of all types of film including fiction, comedies, documentaries and films of geography, animal life and industry (many silent films). Some films may be bought outright. Hire charge: 2s. 6d. a reel (first day), 1s. a reel for each subsequent day. 16 mm.

Kodak Ltd., Kingsway, London, W.C.2. (a) *Kodascope Library*. Silent films of every kind, instructional, documentary, feature, western and comedy. Strong on early American comedies—Harry Langdon, Reginald Denny, Stan Laurel and Chaplin, etc. Hire charge: 2s. 6d. per reel per day. 16 mm. and 8 mm. (A separate *List of Educational Films*, extracted from the above, is also published. A number of films have teaching notes.) (b) *Medical Film Library*. Circulation restricted to members of medical profession. Some colour films. A hire charge is made and some prints are also for outright sale. 16 mm. silent.

Pathescope, North Circular Road, Cricklewood, London, N.W.2. Wide selection of silent films, including cartoons, comedies, drama, documentary, travel, sport and interest subjects; also good selection of early American and German films. Hire charge: 2s. a reel silent, 3s. a reel sound, with reduction for extra days. Prices increased at weekends. 9.5 mm.

Religious Film Library, 104 High Holborn, London, W.C.1. Sound films of religious and temperance appeal and a useful list of supporting films from other sources. Silent films are available. Hire charge: 3s. a reel (silent), 5s. a reel (sound). 16 mm.

Workers' Film Association, 145 Wardour Street, London, W.1. Some outstanding sound films of democratic and co-operative interest, with an excellent selection of films from other sources. Full notes and suggestions for complete programmes. Sound and silent. For sale or hire. 35 mm. and 16 mm.

Sound-Film Services, 10 Park Place, Cardiff. Library of selected sound films including Massingham's *And so to Work* and Pollard's *Dragon of Wales*. *Rome* and *Sahara* have French commentaries. In addition to specialised films some subjects of general entertainment nature. Hire charges: per reel; first day 5s., subsequent days 1s. 6d., weekend 5s. 6d. All 16 mm.

Southern Railway Film Library, General Manager's Office, Waterloo Station, S.E.1. Seven silent films (one in colour) of a general nature, including *Building an Electric Coach*, *South African Fruit* (Southampton Docks to Covent Garden), and films on seaside towns. One film of Bournemouth on 9.5 mm. No hire charges made for approved borrowers.

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NEW DOCUMENTARY FILMS

These Children are Safe. A Strand Film. *Production:* Taylor. *Direction:* Shaw. *Camera:* Jago. *Music:* Alwyn. *Commentary:* Hilton. *Distribution:* Anglo-American (theatrical).

THIS IS SPONSORED by the British Council and will be widely shown abroad. Shaw has stuck very closely to the title. The children we see are safe and happy. Their health and educational problems are being dealt with—in various surroundings. Everyone is being helpful and pleasant. Whether or no this is a fully accurate picture of conditions in the early autumn of 1939 (conditions now are hardly relevant, being so different), it is quite certain that it is a fairly wide and genuine *reportage* of the kids adapting themselves to their new surroundings. It is superbly well directed (Shaw has a special genius with children) and the photography is outstandingly good. A fellow-critic has described Hilton's commentary as "coy". We concur. Shaw's work needed something better.

Transfer of Power. *Production:* Elton. *Direction:* Bell. *Photography:* Beadle. *Diagrams:* Hodker. and

Protection of Fruit. *Production:* Elton. *Direction:* Tharp. *Photography:* Rodwell and Hillier. *Distribution:* Non-theatrical from Petroleum Films Bureau, 15 Hay Hill, W.1. 35 mm. and 16 mm.

TRANSFER OF POWER has created a new style of diagrammatic film, one of the most difficult forms of documentary. It is interesting to compare its treatment with the Atlantic Film efforts along the same lines, as in *Mouvements Vibratoires*. *Transfer of Power*, just as efficient as the latter, avoids somehow the cold and dry French approach.

Transfer of Power is perfect, too, in many other ways; not only are the diagrams themselves treated with simplicity and imagination, but the difficult balance between the diagrams and the straight shooting is fully attained. And, above all, clear explanation, both by visuals and commentary, of such an intricate subject, is successfully achieved. This clarity is the main problem in films of this kind.

Protection of Fruit is a documentary film in which the reason for production is the use of oil in the orchards of various countries. Its main purpose is the showing of the life history, effect and prevention of different types of fruit pests. The diagrams and photography are good. The microscopic camera work excellent. *Protection of Fruit* has not only a pleasant quality of its own but a kind of Wellsian touch about it.

African Skyway. A Strand Film. *Presented:* Taylor. *Camera:* Jago. *Sound cutting:* Elliott. *Distribution:* Anglo-American (theatrical).

By a civil aviation expert.

ALL WHO ENJOY travelogues will like *African Skyway*—a new film for Imperial Airways—which runs for about 30 minutes. It is well connected and one's interest is held throughout. I was quite sorry when the film ended. The film deals with the air route pioneered by Imperial Airways from Cairo to Cape Town. The flying is incidental to the film, which shows life at several of the towns which are ports of call on

the route. I would have preferred a little more of this because one had only a brief glimpse of Khartoum after quite a long stay in Cairo; similarly, I would have liked to have visited places in between Kisumu and Durban. The film, in my opinion, could be lengthened without the risk of its interest flagging.

It opens with some shots of various jungle animals taken presumably from a low-flying aircraft. I found it hard to accustom myself to the movement for a few moments. It might have been better to have a few shots first from a stationary camera to allow the eye to become focussed. The photography is excellent throughout. The high-lights to my mind were a flying boat landing among the dense shipping in Alexandria harbour, a really glorious shot of the Murchison Falls, native women descending from a bus at the equator, and the Sunday native dance at a South African gold mine.

The sound is good and not obtrusive, while the commentary is adequate and never facetious, which is rather unusual these days.

If you use the air mail you must see this film and next time you stick on your blue label you will stop and think of the many stages through which your letter passes on its destination and the wonderful organisation behind the Empire air routes.

Karoo. *Production:* G.B.I. *Direction and Photography:* Schauder. *Editing:* Chambers. *Commentary:* Emmett. *Distribution:* G.F.D. (theatrical).

AS THE TRAVELLER on the "Union Express" from Cape Town to Johannesburg starts his journey, he climbs through magnificent mountain scenery and comes out on a dry, brown, dull plain, covered with sparse shrubs and grasses, through which the train rolls monotonously for hours. This is the Karoo, an area of about 100,000 square miles, more than three thousand feet above sea-level, with an annual rainfall which seldom exceeds twelve inches.

This region is the location of the film *Karoo*, which tells the story of a typical sheep farmer, showing his continual efforts to provide water for his flocks, the protection of the sheep, the shearing, and the sale of the crop in Port Elizabeth. It is one of a series of films made by Leon Schauder in collaboration with G.B.I., and as a serious attempt, by a South African, to show an aspect of South African life on the screen, it marks a great step forward in the development of that country's films.

The director has chosen his types with care, and no one will easily forget the old farmer. The shooting, too, is frequently impressive, and always attractive. But here lies one of the film's weaknesses, for the director seems to prefer a pretty picture to a lucid one, and in his concern with pictorial beauty he fails to get to real grips with his subject. There seems, for instance, to be no justification for including the Cape Town sequence, except as an excuse to use the shots of a liner leaving Table Bay.

The appropriate Afrikaans music could have been more effective by being more sparingly used.

Love on the Wing. *Production:* G.P.O. *Direction:* McLaren. *Camera:* Jones and Gamage. *Dufay-color.* 35 mm. *Distribution:* not fixed.

By an artist and commercial designer

I SUPPOSE IT is inevitable that what first strikes an artist about this film is the painted background. The action all takes place in front of one of those bare Chiricoesque settings that seem to have crept into the repertoire of even the commercial studios. In the unfamiliar world of the films one clings to the familiar fantasy. It's a very pleasant world this one, nice colour and looks warm. When the action starts it looks like ballet broken loose from the laws of gravity. Bouquets are certainly due to Mr McLaren for his handling of the story. The little figures, drawn in simple fat white outline, grow and change with alarming and gay vitality. Possibly the action is a little fast for the unsophisticated eye. Some of the allusion of the drawing is lost because such extreme simplification of ideas (lovers kissing become two mouths kissing and so on) requires a little interval for the idea to get across to the audience. I suspect that Mr McLaren has tried to force too many pictorial ideas into the film. Anyway it's a fault on the right side.

Cargo for Ardrossan. *Direction:* R. I. Grierson. *Assistant:* Keen. *Camera:* Jeakins. *Production:* R.F.U. *Distribution:* Anglo-American (theatrical).

HERE IS AN unpretentious documentary with the precious virtue of never getting too big for its boots, which Miss Grierson keeps firmly to the ground she has chosen—the relationship between two sharply contrasting yet economically inseparable communities.

The mode of life of the Scottish island of Islay is shaped by the mixed cargoes which arrive by steamer from Glasgow, ninety miles away—an adulteration of native simplicities which has been known to provide many a pessimistic theme for the primitive-seeking escapists amongst our directors. The oil tankers which tie up at the wharves of Ardrossan bring, not only to Glasgow but also to the people of Islay the means to tempting modern comforts and untraditional mechanisations. Yet Miss Grierson finds no slackening of moral fibre in her islanders. She observes and records their day to day behaviour with an unsentimental affection which illuminates the least spectacular of the human virtues, and demonstrates that the people of Islay are no more likely to be seduced by commerce than is the Chief Tester back in Glasgow whom we see supervising, with magnificent composure, the first try-out of his enormous new Diesel engine.

The film ends with a reminder that even oil from Ardrossan cannot still the troubled waters which condition the life of a small island. Yet the storm sequence is not used as a melodramatic climax. Here again, economy and under-statement, and a brilliant but unobtrusive camera, present commonplace drama in terms of those less obvious but more fundamental elements that seem to spring quickest to the eye of our women directors.

Secrets of Life. Production: G.B.I. Direction: Mary Field. Photography: Smith, Pike, Durden. Commentary: Emmett. Colour System: Dufaycolor. Distribution: G.F.D. (theatrical).

BRUCE WOOLFE'S "Secrets of Life" have been seen on the country's screens for so long that one must applaud the tenacity, imagination, and above all patience, which have made them possible. The present series represents a fresh stage of progress. They are photographed in Dufaycolor. The very quietness and somewhat subdued tones are appropriate to films of natural history. Dufaycolor, moreover, with its single negative, makes the task of the cameraman easier. Some of the more cumbersome systems would make such photography of wild life impossible. In certain shots the colour is very beautiful. A young badger, with his black and white striped coat, enjoying himself in a pool of muddy water, and a shot of the edge of a pond, with its stony bottom showing through the clear water, are lovely things.

If colour does not unduly limit the cameraman in terms of exposure and focus, filming wild creatures should be easier. The difficulty of getting animals to do what the director wants is presumably the same, but colour permits greater differentiation. A male stickleback is clearly distinguished from a female by his pink throat, whereas in monotone both would look identical.

Microphotography, too, is aided by colour and when the blood of an embryo newt develops from a colourless to a fairly red fluid, the change is easily discernible and scientifically important. Artistic though colour films can be, their greatest importance is probably scientific. Accurate colour therefore becomes essential.

Colour is a definite approach towards realism. A water-beetle, or a dragon-fly larva in colour is much more real, and less photographic. Underwater life becomes something terrifying, instead of quaint and charming. But in these particular films it is difficult to estimate this realism, because when comparison becomes possible the commentator usually makes some crack which serves to distract the attention.

The production maintains the standard which former films in the series have set. But it is permissible to criticise the commentaries. A commentary can be interesting, informative, and amusing, without being facetious, and it is a doubtful pleasure to sit through a whole ten minutes of Emmett's rather overwhelming charivari.

DUTCH DOCUMENTARY

THOUGH THE SIZE of the world population speaking Dutch is relatively small, Holland has shown considerable activity in peace-time in the making of documentary films, more so for example than Belgium, Denmark, Norway or Sweden. Perhaps the most interesting documentary film maker is Dr J. C. Møl of Multifilm (Haarlem). Dr Møl is a specialist in natural history, and his films are the only ones which we know which can be compared with those of Percy Smith and Mary Field (G.B.I.). His study of the life cycle of the mosquito is one of the most remarkable films of its kind ever made. He has also made colour films of the formation of crystals out of solution and a number of black and white films on the same subject. Unfortunately he has not the backing of a system of distribution.

The brothers de Haas (Visie-Film, Amsterdam) are also well known for the high level of their work. Until war broke out they were making a picture for the centenary of the Dutch Railways. Other films are *De Ballade van Hoogen Hoed* (Ballad of the Silk Hat), a highbrow film in the early *avant garde* style, and a documentary for K.L.M. on the Dutch East Indies.

Working independently is Otto von Neyenhoff, a freelance documentary director. His films are well up to the level of work in other countries. In his *Rijksmuseum* he has taken a static subject, a picture gallery, and made it live.

Jan Teunissen, the director of *Pierement* and *Sabbath*, was recently working in Paris. Joris Ivens, whose films date back to the early days of documentary, has made social films in Russia, Spain and China and is at present in New York.

One of the commercial film studios, Barnstijn Filmstad at the Hague, has made a three-reeler of the Dutch broadcasting company A.V.R.O. which, though a little uninspired in treatment, is finely photographed and recorded. Unfortunately, the full length film released in 1938, describing the rise of Holland as a Colonial and European power, seems to have died an untimely death. Few people have seen the film and it is said to have been a commercial failure. It was directed by a Paris trained English director instead of use being made of the abundant Dutch talent available.

There are several fine cameramen in Holland

and the work of Andor von Barsy, a Hungarian by birth, can be compared with any exterior photography in the world.

Dutch documentary distribution is also in advance of that in many other countries. Public cinemas are hired on Sunday and weekday mornings by private groups of restricted membership who have come together for cultural reasons; the movement is a flourishing one, and the theatres cost anything from £2 to £20 a time. The movement is analogous to the work of Film Societies in England.

In other cases money is collected at the door, and the shows appear often to be run as an ordinary commercial speculation. The films, however, have a specialised appeal. There is no formal membership, and any member of the public may come in.

Certain municipalities have forbidden the use of cinemas on Sunday mornings on religious grounds, but no objections are raised in the Hague, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Haarlem, Utrecht, Leeuwarden and Nijmegen. In no circumstances are the cinemas opened before 11 a.m.

There is also a travelling road-show movement similar to that operating in England and handling films of an advertising nature.

Co-ordinating all distribution activities is the Nederlandsche Vereniging voor Culturele Films. This organisation serves as a national film library. The main demand is for silent films. But it is to be noted that few of the Dutch schools, which number over 1,500, possess even silent projectors. The N.V.C.F. not only collates information and publishes a catalogue but imports non-theatrical films from abroad and enters directly into the field of distribution. It hires films to those who hold projectors, it hires projectors to those who hold films, and it organises shows in cinemas, mostly to adult education groups. N.V.C.F., though officially recognised, is financed by private subscription.

There is also another group, the Cinematografische Volksuniversiteit. (Manager: Dr N. H. Wolf.) Dr Wolf is an ex-veterinary surgeon who also edits the paper *Den Kunst*. He organises Sunday morning shows up and down Holland of films varying from Vertov's Russian film on women to Frank Buck's *Bring 'Em Back Alive*. His organisation is without official backing.

DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER readers will be interested in these pamphlets

THE STORY OF THE DOCUMENTARY FILM

by John Grierson

Reprinted from the Fortnightly Review

SEARCHLIGHT ON DEMOCRACY

by John Grierson

a lecture to The British Institute of Adult Education

THE CINEMA AND THE INFORMATION SERVICES

by Thomas Baird

a lecture to The Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux

obtainable price 3d. each (post free), from 34 Soho Square, London, W.1

FILM SOCIETY NEWS

AFTER AN AUTUMN season in which London, for the first time in many years, was virtually without Film Society performances, it is good news that the London Scientific Film Society has opened up again. Programmes in the past have been of especial value in the work of interpreting science to the layman, and the wide scope and catholicity of its shows have been enthusiastically received. It is very important that this enterprising body should be fully supported, as war-time conditions tend to make its existence precarious. At the first performance of the season seven films were shown, including several "Secrets of Life" films, a Len Lye colour-experiment, Bell's film on Gears, and Cavalcanti's *Men in Danger*. Subscriptions for the season of four performances cost 10s. or 15s., and membership can be obtained from the Secretary, 30 Bedford Row, W.C.1; telephone: Chancery 5201.

Meantime, there is much encouraging news from the provinces. The Lochaber Film Society, which flourishes exceedingly in the relatively sparsely populated district of Fort William, Scotland, is not merely giving good shows, but arranging link-ups of great civic value. When, for instance, it showed *The Londoners* (John Taylor's L.C.C. Jubilee Film), members of the Fort William Town Council received special invitations, and local Post Office workers are invited when G.P.O. Film Unit productions are shown. Moreover, the secretary reports that the local cinema has been

persuaded to play *Professor Mamlock*—probably the first time a foreign language film has been shown commercially in such a small town.

In the Manchester area both the Manchester and Salford Film Society and the Merseyside Film Institute Society are centres of great activity. Manchester and Salford report that within three days of mailing the prospectus for the season membership reached 200, and is still climbing. Programmes already announced include *Peter the Great*, *Amphitryon*, *Roads Across Britain*, *Spare Time*, and *Drame de Shanghai*. The two societies also gave a joint performance which included a talk by Herbert Hodge. The Merseyside Film Institute Society also sponsors special film shows at the Philharmonic Hall, which include a wide variety of documentaries and other shorts, and feature films such as *Green Pastures*. Both Societies also run sub-standard lecture meetings, at which pioneer films like *Caligari* are shown and discussed. Other Societies still in action include Edinburgh, Tyneside, Birmingham, Street, and Sheffield.

We should be glad of full monthly reports from these and any other societies. Our press day is the 12th of each month. This page should be a useful forum for the exchange of news and views between all Film Societies, but it can only achieve this end if all secretaries will co-operate. Correspondence on Film Society topics will be welcomed.

BOOK REVIEW

Nobody Ordered Wolves. Jeffrey Dell. Heinemann. 7s. 6d.

IF ONE TAKES this book as a skit on the British Film Industry, it is very funny. Extravagance, waste, stupidity, subservience and crooked dealing are the proper materials for humour.

But when one realises that Mr Dell's material is only very slightly distorted in the telling and that the difference between straight reporting and a work of fiction is conditioned more by the laws of libel than of creation, laughter remains but is tinged with indignation.

Dell's story, the respective fortunes of Philip Hardcastle, storywriter, and Napoleon Bott, the colossus of the British Film Industry, departs from the truth chiefly in that Mr Bott ends up a bankrupt, whereas his counterparts in real life prosper and wax fat.

Nobody Ordered Wolves does not discover a new novelist to the public. Outside the film business, his story is rather weak. The construction of the book is loose and diversions such as the career of Miss De la Roche, *née* Amy Spragget, instructive though they are, are irrelevant. But his knowledge of the film world, his characterisation of Bott, Mr Cripps, Miss Carr and a dozen others, is accurate and amusing. It is a change from the showdown novel of Hollywood, because the British Film Industry, while imitating the worst features of Hollywood, has introduced a number of quirks of its own.

THE OBEDIENT FLAME

A FILM ABOUT SCIENTIFIC COOKERY

PRODUCED BY ARTHUR ELTON

DIRECTED BY NORMAN McLAREN

RUNNING TIME 18 MINUTES

THIS is a two-reel film. The first part is a scientific description of the gas flame. Its flexibility is discussed and then it is shown as the basis of the gas cooker. This sequence is mainly in diagram, and the special qualities of a gas flame are thus made clear. The scientific accuracy of the "Regulo" and its working are depicted.

THE second part of the film shows the gas cooker at work, and many different styles of cooking are demonstrated.

AVAILABLE FREE OF CHARGE FROM:

THE BRITISH COMMERCIAL GAS ASSOCIATION, 1 GROSVENOR PLACE, LONDON, S.W.1

A GAS INDUSTRY FILM

Last year Merton Park Studios Ltd.—associated with Publicity Films Ltd. and Sound-Services Ltd.—produced films for the Ministry of Labour, the British Electrical Development Association, the Ford Motor Company, the Co-operative Wholesale Society, Cadbury Brothers Ltd., the Crown Agents for the Colonies, the Millers' Mutual Association, Metropolitan Vickers Electrical Company Ltd., Hoover Ltd., the National Savings Committee, the Gas Light and Coke Company, the School for the Blind, Chokladfabriken Marabou and many others.

The films were about electrical machinery in mines, helping the unemployed in distressed areas, how to sell chocolates, electricity in rural areas, Claude Hulbert, how to cook, circuses, Palestine, some of Mr Cochran's Young Ladies, the wheat trade and many other trades, products and subjects.

Now we are making films about food rationing, how motor cars are made, colloids in medicine, industry in war-time, the National Register, and the manufacture of liquid oxygen.

We believe in the budgeting and control of costs during progress of production and in scheduling to meet delivery dates; in provision of adequate equipment and studios; in the assignment of technicians from a pool of technical personnel; and in the general supervision necessary to secure a high technical standard of quality. We also believe in giving the maximum liberty of expression to our creative workers. We think that is why we can cope successfully with such an extraordinary variety of subjects and produce films which achieve the objects for which they have been made.

STRAND FILMS

MAKERS OF QUALITY SHORTS

Films completed for release this quarter

THESE CHILDREN ARE SAFE

GULLIBLE GULL

MEN OF AFRICA

AFRICAN SKYWAY

WINGS OVER THE EMPIRE

SYDNEY EASTBOUND

"... notable practitioners in this department" (Documentary Films)

News Chronicle

DONALD TAYLOR, Managing Director